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AUTHOR Ross, Jeff; And Others
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ABSTRACT

In fall 1996, a learning community (LC) involving a biology, a philosophy, and an English composition course was conducted at the Superstition Mountain campus of Central Arizona College. Entitled "Brave New World," the LC met the syllabi-required outcomes for the three courses, while also concentrating on environmental, political, genetic, sociobiological, and animal rights issues. For the biology course, students used the same text and completed the same labs and tests as students in the traditional course, while they were required to write four major papers for the ethics class and seven essays for the composition course. In addition, students participated in a weekly seminar and prepared a 15-minute presentation and related poster on an article discussed in the LC. Teachers' reactions to the LC ranged from enthusiasm over the successful combination of subject matters to despair that freshmen students do not have sufficient learning and interpersonal skills to undertake an LC. Benefits of the LC process cited by students in project evaluations included the ability to connect disciplines without hurting the integrity of each course and increased learning due to interaction with other students. Weaknesses cited by students included a lack of participation/contribution by some students and the immense amount of work required by the extra seminar. Narratives describing the teachers' perceptions of the LC and student comments are included. Contains 17 references. (HAA)

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Brave New World Learning Community

Jeff Ross
Mary Puglia
Judy Stiers

Central Arizona College
Superstition Mountain Campus

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Paper presented at the Central Arizona College Third Annual Learning Community Retreat (Gold Canyon, AZ, February 1-2, 1997).

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Brave New World Learning Community

Title III Final Report

A Paper Presented at the Central Arizona College Third Annual Learning Community Retreat, Gold Canyon, Arizona, February 1 and 2, 1997

by Jeff Ross, Mary Puglia, and Judy Stiers

Central Arizona College-Superstition Mountain Campus

I. Introduction

During the fall semester1996, a Learning Community [LC] entitled **Brave New World** was conducted at Central Arizona College-Superstition Mountain Campus. Three courses, including Biology 100, Philosophy 105 (Ethics) and English Composition (101,102, or 203, depending on student needs) were taught within the LC. A description of the LC, the content of the courses, special requirements of the LC, student evaluative remarks, and the faculty's reflective impressions follow. As well as meeting the syllabi-required outcomes for its courses, the **Brave New World LC** also concentrated on environmental, political, genetic, sociobiological, and animal rights issues. Related poems, essays, short stories, and news articles were introduced. Guest speakers and videos were also significant components of the LC. Each student was asked to make a 15-minute presentation which summarized an article containing information relevant to the LC. Students were asked to create a poster illustrating the topic of their presentation. (These posters were displayed in the college's teaching/learning center.)

The LC met each Tuesday and Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. Lectures were given by the instructors during the mornings; Tuesday afternoon was reserved for biology lab activities and Thursday afternoon was dedicated to the LC Seminar. Faculty also met with students during lunch hours to assist them with lab exercises, research papers, homework

assignments, and test preparation. No absolute schedule for lectures was maintained; the faculty members met before each LC to discuss their time requirements for the day.

Twenty three students began the LC; sixteen received final grades. No special screening or placement was used for admitting students to the LC other than the college's regular ASSET reading, writing, and math skills placement test.

Each student enrolled in BIO 100, PHI 105, and either ENG 101, 102, or 203 (Advanced Composition). The BIO 100 course was the most "standard" of the three; the students used the same textbook and performed the same labs as students enrolled in the non-LC BIO courses taught at SMC. They were given the same tests as traditional BIO 100 students and completed similar lab exercises.

The Ethics students concentrated on ethical issues in the biotic community and moral relativism. They were asked to write four major papers in which they addressed questions raised by authors read during the course. They were not required to purchase a text; articles were distributed to them. (Article titles and authors for both the English and Philosophy courses are located in the references, page 19).

All students enrolled in the three English composition classes wrote seven essays based on the same seven readings, readings that dealt with ecological and sociobiological issues. ENG 101 students were required to purchase a grammar/usage reference text only; the ENG 102 students were asked to purchase a research text by Lester (1996). The essays had slightly different requirements and were evaluated differently, but the basic "sameness" of the assignments proved to make the combination of comp classes successful. The ENG 101 and 203 students were asked to write 1/3 summary, 2/3 reaction to each of the articles. 102 students were asked to write 1/3 summary, 1/3

definition of terms and concepts, and 1/3 reaction to each of the articles. (The ENG 102 students also had to create a 2,000 word research paper based on a LC-related topic). All the composition students were required to use APA style for quotation and citation matters.

The Thursday afternoon seminar session was designed to give students an opportunity to voice their opinions on different issues, themes, and concerns which had been brought up in the LC. During seminar, the LC viewed the movies Higher Education and The Emerald Forest. Students watched the PBS production The Secret of Life and a Star Trek Voyager episode that dealt with suicide. The seminar also required three types of writing activities: students were required to keep a journal on their readings from Brave New World, to write a one-page summary on assignments from Deep Ecology, and to complete movie reviews. An ongoing activity in the seminar was the development of a Global Bill of Rights. Four guest speakers used seminar time to address such topics as deep relaxation techniques, Tai Kwon Do and martial arts, deep touch techniques, and the Animal Liberation Movement.

II. January, 1997: Faculty Impressions One Month after the LC was concluded

Jeff Ross

We did an excellent job of combining the three disciplines in terms of assignments, faculty cooperation and collaboration, and our own interest and involvement. We should do a better job of orienting students-- many of the LC students seemed unprepared to the kind of scholarly activities the LC required. The Deep Ecology text should probably be replaced since the students found it too difficult to read. (They also thought it was too liberal, too left wing, too unrealistic.) We certainly need to improve the classroom

management aspects of the LC. We especially need a better defined attendance policy and a stronger stance on late papers and other late assignments. We didn't think attendance would be a concern, but it certainly became one.

Our LC syllabus did not contain an attendance policy statement, but it did indicate that participation would contribute to the seminar grade. Gradually, we linked participation with attendance within our grading philosophy, and so we began to distribute attendance sign up sheets a few weeks into the semester. This created some concerns. (Many of the students voice these concerns in their evaluations contained elsewhere in this report.)

The faculty assumed the intellectual freedoms and creativity encouraged by the LC environment would instill more enthusiasm, more dedication, and more maturity in the students. I didn't find this to always be the case. I have a sense that most LC students enrolled in the LC because of scheduling convenience (10 credit hours in just two days) rather than because of thematic interests or intellectual stimulation.

I have mixed feelings about teaching the three different levels of composition simultaneously. On the positive side, the advanced comp students served as excellent mentors for the 101 and 102 students. Students did some very good writing, and the writing improved tremendously. I always had a sense that the 102 students did not receive sufficient research/paper format training, even though I met with them as a separate group on several occasions.

Many first semester college students in the LC thought it was similar to their high school experience, especially in terms of scheduling and the open class environment. I need to further consider this aspect of the LC. I believe the LC is the best way to teach and learn;

I also have a feeling that not all students (nor faculty) will benefit from the LC experience.

Judy Stiers

In retrospect I now realize that I embarked on this mission with a good deal of optimism and idealism. I had hoped that my appreciation for interdisciplinary studies would be absorbed by the eager minds awaiting my arrival every Tuesday and Thursday. I recalled doing interdisciplinary studies in graduate school exciting. I found it exciting. I had seen this same excitement in students' faces in subsequent years of teaching when they discovered some continuity among their history and philosophy classes. This was looked upon by all as a "happy" accident.

So, when I was given the opportunity to help develop and teach a learning community, I had the feeling I had been given the chance of a lifetime. "A new way of teaching" and "teaching in the future" were common phrases I used as the semester began.

By December, all of these bubbles had been burst as I woke up to the realities of teaching. To make a long story short, one quick trip from idealism to cynicism.

I believe one of the greatest challenges facing any teacher of interdisciplinary studies is overcoming the programmed "compartmentalized" learning habits that are a necessary consequence of the educational system. It takes a great deal of time and effort to lay enough groundwork for students to begin to see the connections between different fields of study. But it is a task worth the effort if this basic realization is achieved. When this challenge is coupled with ignorance, illiteracy, and prejudice, the task becomes nearly impossible.

I believe now that it is a mistake to attempt this type of learning community at the 100 [freshmen course] level. In order for the LC to work successfully, the students must be able to bring some level of intelligence, competence, and open-mindedness to the learning experience. Without this, the impossible task of "providing a unique learning experience" falls on the shoulders of the instructors alone.

Interdisciplinary studies can, indeed, be a wonderful learning experience, but it takes a lot of hard work on the part of the students. Spoon feeding does not work.
At this point, I am completely discouraged over the entire effort. I am not willing to invest any further time and effort into teaching in an impossible Learning Community. I am convinced that the faculty had a valuable learning experience. It was a wonderful opportunity for me to learn about the interconnection of ethics and biology. But when student gossip including racial slurs is followed up by hypocritical papers attacking racism, I can only conclude that my efforts as an ethics instructor have failed. . . .

Mary Puglia

I really like the concept of the Learning Community. I think it is an excellent way to teach and to learn. I was exposed to many new ideas and subjects that I had not been exposed to before. LC's are chameleons, changing "color" or focus with the combination of classes that goes into them. For an instructor, it would be very challenging to be involved in more than one LC over the course of an academic year. The emphasis changes depending on what classes are melded together, so even with a core class, the subject matter can be presented in many different ways.

I was forced to look at Biology concepts in new ways and to continually find connections between biology and the other classes. At first, I thought this would be the most difficult part, but it actually turned out to be easier than I had thought. Articles appeared in

newspapers and magazines that related directly to what was being covered in class. Sometimes it seemed like a miracle. I remember debating whether or not to discuss the theory of evolution in detail, since many of the students were fundamental Christians. I decided to do an overview of human evolution according to the available fossil record and right before the day of the lecture, the headlines in the newspapers were "The Pope Endorses Evolution Theory."

All semester, these coincidences occurred. I found that being in the LC helped me conceptualize new ways to teach the introductory biology course. Next semester, in the traditional setting, I'm going to have a weekly seminar. Students will look through magazines, newspapers, and journals to find relevant articles and we'll connect them to biological concepts. I should be a good way for students to apply what they are learning to everyday situations.

On the negative side, a LC requires students with strong reading and writing skills. Also, they must have an appropriate depth of knowledge in order to explore all aspects of the LC. Things I took to be common knowledge very often turned out not to be. During one discussion on HIV, a student wanted to know why we (as a society) couldn't require people infected with HIV to wear some sort of identification. When the instructors mentioned WW II, Hitler, Nazis and the ACLU, the student had no idea what we were talking about. All she knew about WW II is that the U.S. won. Another discussion on the subject of a global bill of rights led to the question, "What is the United Nations, anyway?" In order for students to get the maximum benefit out of this type of experiences, they need to have a good academic background and probably at least one semester of college behind them.

Classroom management is very important. You can't treat 18-22 year olds the same way as graduate students. Attendance was a constant source of irritation. Whenever a paper was due in English or Ethics, attendance dropped because many of the students were in the library typing their papers. They had no idea how to plan their time so that the assignments were finished by the due date. An LC protocol almost requires you to treat the students as adults, but many students take that lenient approach and abuse it. Maturity level is not there for every student. Late arrivals were another sore point during the semester. All policies need to be explicitly stated in the syllabus. We made the mistake of assuming all students want to learn, tried to be flexible, and it haunted us for the semester. My M.S. is in microbiology. I learned more about classroom management, learning styles, and teaching methods from doing this LC than I ever could from an education class.

The purpose of an education, in the truest sense, is to broaden the way you look at the world. To gain knowledge and experience often means being able to exert more control over your life. Many people go to college expecting to sit through classes, memorize facts, and take tests. An LC can challenge them more than a traditional class and in ways they don't expect. It can sneak up on them. Some minds may be opened. Some students may realize that the value of an education is a lifelong asset and not just a ticket to a job.

III. October 2, 1996 CAC-SMC Brave New World Learning Community Student Quick Evaluations

1. Why did I enroll in the Learning Community?

> Quizzical looks... A glance to the stars & Oh yea, Jeff Ross recruited me during enrollment. Sounded interesting!
>
> The learning community offered the best time management along with credits for my degree.

Because Jeff Ross suggested it, it fit my schedule, and it seemed different (which is good).

It sounded like a good way to get a large amount of credits done together.

I enrolled into the learning community because of its convenient schedule.

I thought it would be interesting to see the connection between biology and English. I also thought it would be interesting to learn the ethics involved in genetic engineering. I also needed the credits.

Because it worked out well with my schedule outside of school and it had classes I needed.

For the experience, not for the classes but to see what I could learn. Jeff Ross suggested I attend the class.

The reasons for my enrolling was because the classes are part of my major, and two because the scheduling was perfect for me and my other classes.

I liked the fact that I could get 10 credits & only lose 2 workdays a week,

I enrolled in the L.C. because it had the classes I needed in a fixed time schedule. Also because I wanted to try something different.

Because Dr. Ross suggested it and it sounded interesting. I was totally undecided on my courses and these 3 sounded good.

The learning community sounded interesting because the mixture of classes and working the three classes together.

I enrolled in the Learning Community because I thought it would be a good experience for me as a first year student.

I enrolled in the learning community because it not only included the classes/ credits I needed, but it made a group learning process evolve from each of the 3 classes. Biology (& Science as a whole) has always been difficult for me, so this was also a more comfortable & eased approach to a class (BIO) that I have avoided for the fear of failure.

2. List strengths of the LC

The combination of instructors. The adult themes which may (or may not) wake up some sleeping giants. Intensity of intellectual challenges. I'm finally learning proper mechanics.

1. Makes me interconnect better, I appreciate biology (science) for the 1st time. Ethics & English are preferred subject matter areas.
2. Saves time.
3. Three teachers' opinions are better than 1.

Helps us work together since the same people are in the same classes. I like three classes having to do w/each other. Makes it easier.

The program covers such a broad range of topics. It's interesting how the instructors lent to each other's lectures. The social interactions in the class are very fun. Rather than just copying notes all day the discussions we have really bring home the curriculum.

The learning community does connect the subjects without hurting the integrity of each class.

The combination of classes and how it sticks to the areas of biology and deep ecology.

Its all interacted. You get to know the people in the classes more.

(Hard work, but learning a lot.)

A) Other students to explore concepts and help with resources.
B) The seminars afternoon offer many different perceptions on many topics.
C) Get a better view of subjects as they cross the boundaries of curriculum.

Schedule of the class, only two days a week.

Strengths of the Learning Comm. I think the way our topics fit together.

Good teachers.

Three classes intermingled makes people think. Three teachers for 20 or so students. Allows people to air opinions.

It makes taking these classes easier than taking them alone.
Strengths of the learning community are the qualified instructors & their knowledge & background. Also the teachers are eager to help.

3. Weaknesses.

Not enough communal contribution; I seem to do most of the discussion. I don't know if it's because I'm long winded or the rest just have nothing to say.

Can't think of any.

Couldn't tell you.

It's so big it's overwhelming.

The weakness is having three different level English courses lumped into one class. It gets confusing which English class you're referring to.

The seminar period is like having a fourth class. I don't think that we should have assignments due for a class we don't get credit for. I also think that the learning community is stuck with the environmental topic. It would have been better if we could have discussed a larger range of biological/ethical topics. The discussions in seminar are disorganized. If we were split up into groups we might have more sensible and directed discussions.

Seminar seems like a whole other class that we don't get credit for.

Not enough time for each independent class discussions.

Too many different things to read & try to remember at one time.

Weaknesses would be probably the hour at lunch or the length of the classes meaning maybe if we started at 8:00 am take lunch at 12-12:30 and get out at 2:00 - would be somewhat better.

Lots of papers.

Cannot concentrate upon just one subject - arguments upon religion.

The Deep Ecology book hasn't had much effect on me. I don't see where it is directed at me realistically.

Weaknesses of the learning community. I'm not really sure - it's hard to evaluate this based on the fact that it's so new & we're only 6 weeks into the

semester. I think the trial & error method is a positive approach, because it will help future LC's.

4. Most significant/interesting topic.

I enjoy ethics, but not in & of itself. It is the biological connection with which it's purposefully targeted. I appreciate the interaction between others. Being a renaissance man. The science & philosophy & literature is bubble gum for my brain.

Wow life, its purpose in relationship to God. Finding the Fine line between good/evil love/hate war/peace fantasy/reality. BALANCE - my personal goal to find (seek) God. That issue - Who is God.

Mid-life myths.

Everything, from suicide to cell division. That's what makes it so interesting. .

At present DNA and its link to all life on earth.

DNA and Genetics, and how they can control what we do.

So far the most interesting topic - I've enjoyed most of the topics and came away with a better understanding.

Everything has fallen into what my major of studies is about so I can really pin point one special area.

Simply people and what were about or what we think were about. The differences in individuals.

Goal setting.

Whether Euthanasia was right or wrong.

The chi was very interesting. I am amazed at what it can do.

The Genome Project.

Everything we've learned is significant. Because, knowledge & education is significant. The most significant thing we've discussed is the science of life in general. I also thought it was interesting how the Biology & Ethics have combined into several interesting facts such as the anti-abortion guy that was faced w/death & then went against everything he had spoken for & used fetal tissue to save his own life. The suicide issue was interesting & also what

we've learned about other cultures. Taoism, Chi, genetics, the book Brave New World, some items in Deep Ecology (The World view), it's all been interesting.

Suggestion: This learning community can be easier to handle with one English class preferably Eng. 102 because it is a report oriented community in my opinion.

SEMINAR: Student-generated PLUS DELTA
October 31, 1996

PLUS

Interaction
Exposed to different perspectives
Guest speakers
Connective of classes and opens one's opinion

Team spirit/work

WISH LIST

Specific topics
Outline seminar
Field trips
Teachers should be more directive in seminar
Biosphere
More positive emphasis
Change agency for good

DELTA

Too much hostility
More structure
Debate
Schedule
Relevance of guest speakers
Defensiveness
Tolerance
Discussion groups
Deep ecology
Seminar tickets to generate issues

Open-mindedness

IV. Learning Community Student Reflections December, 1996
Volunteer reflections from eight LC completers.

A. How has the Learning Community affected your world view, your sense of values?

1. The LC has affected me more in the way I look at my environment. I am more aware of my way of thinking towards social issues, too.

2. The LC has affected my life quite a bit. I look differently at the biological structures of animals and humans and non living organisms. I also look differently at how I think equally of each other.

3. The LC opened my eyes to a connection between different subjects.

4. I don't have so much a changed view but an awakened one. I have always lived a secluded life in that I ignored the world around me. This LC has literally unlocked many closed and ignored doors in my mind and has given me a new insight on education in the world in general.

5. The LC has made me more aware of other societies and their plights and approaches to solving and dealing with certain issues. When we wrote the global bill of rights, it seemed as if the class was having difficulty setting these rights around the global community. We wee still thinking of ourselves (US). It made me realize how selfish we as a society can be.

6. The LC has affected my world view in many ways. I have been mentally enriched by the many perspectives presented in the LC.

7. The LC affected many of my views and practices. Our family has started recycling and all members seem to be excited by the process. My children are concerned that I am becoming a full fledged tree hugger. I have tried to share with them some of the concerns with the environment I have learned in class. My son seems to be reluctant to change his views. We have enjoyed some interesting discussions.

8.The LC has helped to reinforce the values and beliefs I already had. I have always taken a conservative approach to environmental issues. The LC 's use of the Deep Ecology text showed me that there are many people who take a very liberal approach to the same issue. People like me are needed to balance the scales.

B. How was the Learning Community different from other courses you have taken?

1. The LC difference was the way it took three ordinary subjects, combined them, and then made the courses integrated to make the LC experience interesting rather than generic and dull. By combining the three courses, one complemented the others and

eventually by doing this I believe it made every lecture from every subject more memorable. Each class dealt with something different from the other classes.

2. The LC was much more in depth. Also, since we spent all day around each other on T-TH we became very comfortable with each other. We were more at ease to express and share our thoughts and ideas. More creativity and wanting to learn.

3. The LC was different from other courses I've taken because some alternative and different approaches to the course work was offered instead of the traditional syllabus. There was spontaneity and flexibility.

4. The LC was different in many ways. The individual applications were really interconnected, making understanding and practicality easier. There were also more students to share ideas and concerns.

5. The LC was very focused on one area of thought. Although it go repetitive at times, I feel that I have learned more than I would have had I taken the courses separately.

6. The LC was a little different. I stayed in the same room with the same bunch of kids and changed teachers. In high school I changed kids, rooms, and teachers.

7. It was different because the teachers actually worked together.

C. Describe the Learning Community to a friend.

1. The LC is a great course. You do a lot of writing but in the end you gain more out of the three combined courses than if you had taken them separately. The courses make every class interesting because each class deals with a subject from the other classes in the LC.

2. The LC is an excellent way to learn more about the connections between three different courses. Also, a family like feeling of camaraderie between students and instructors was achieved. An easier, less stressful way to earn 10 credits.

3. The LC is one class that combines three classes that become interrelated.

4. The Learning Community is very interesting but it is rather disorganized when it comes to the grading scale and policy. The attendance policy is more disorganized than the rest. However, what we've learned in here outweighs the confusion we've gone through.

5. The LC is a lot of hard work, but worth all the trouble because of the relationships between the subjects. The work load really was heavy but not as heavy as it would have been if I had taken each class separately. It was also easier to understand all the subjects because all the instructors were using the same references.

6. The LC is a class with three subjects. You have biology, ethics, and English. It takes a lot of work so don't take it unless you are prepared for it.

7. It is three different courses combined into one. You stay in one room and three different instructors try to interconnect ethics, biology, and English.

D. Suggest a 3 course combo for a new LC.

1. history, geography poli sci, or
   math, English 101, history, or
   typing, computers 101, English 101, or
   world religions, history, science class of some kind.
2. political science, ethics, English 101
3. math, foreign language, and communications or speech
4. Psychology, English 101, and anatomy.
5. sociology, English Comp, and history
6. sociology, ethics, English
7. art appreciation, American lit, and sociology

E. How successful were the instructors at integrating the courses?

1. I would say very successful period.

2. On a scale of 1-10, I'd say 8.

3. A very good job.

4. Very successful. The seminar integrated each of the courses very nicely.

5. The instructors of the courses were very good. I enjoyed being in each of their classes.

6. The instructors were very successful in integrating the courses. As mentioned in #2, I liked the flexibility the instructors demonstrated when a new connection was made between the courses.

7. The instructors did a fantastic job of integrating their classes. Some of the concepts may not have affected all the students at this time. But the seeds have been planted. So it may be years before some of the students truly understand the concepts.

F. What was the most memorable moment of the LC?

1. The Hemp presentation by Josh!

2. Having the other teachers participate as classmates. Our English and Ethics instructors had funny reactions during biology dissections!

3. My most memorable moment was being asked to be a group leader in ethics. I was really proud of myself.

4. Some of the movies we saw really caused deep thought. Josh's presentation on hemp was very memorable. I went home and shared his ideas with my family.

5. When Frank went crazy over the fact that a man purchased some land and then wouldn't allow hunters on it. He resented that these nature loving hunters would not be able to shoot game on his land.

6. My most memorable moment is actually my biology test scores. In high school I could never get beyond a D and now I am getting B's.

G. My biggest complaint?

1. The fact that the instructors waited until the end of the semester to throw in an attendance policy. I felt that it was unfair to suddenly decide that absence was somehow related to our participation in seminar so that they could punish us for something that they with their lack of forethought, forgot to put in the syllabus. I also feel that as a student I have the right to decide which classes I attend. I pay for my classes and what I get out of it is what I put in to it. If I only want to get a C out of the class then I have a right. I also feel that the instructors job is to teach and to grade. They have no personal stake in whether or not I succeed. ....

2. My biggest complaint is keeping a journal on BNW. I liked the book but didn't like analyzing my reaction to it. I felt it was well written, not something to become emotionally overwrought over.

3. My biggest complaint would be the lack of an attendance policy at the beginning of the semester. Another complaint would be not enough time for class discussion on some topics. The last complaint would be the lack of going over the chapters of Deep Ecology and Brave New World. Both could have used more discussion on topics to help further the understanding behind the writings.

4. Too much time in between school and only two days to discuss and go over everything.

5. Too much writing. I think maybe the journal for BNW could go. We had plenty of work already to worry about. Maybe if you had us write a reaction toward everything we read, it wouldn't have been too bad.

6. The biggest complaint is how the rules were changed at the end of the semester concerning certain issues like attendance. Also, the way the assignments were scheduled due on the same days created a lot of work.

7. Too long of a lunch break-- maybe we could do 1/2 hour instead of 1 hour so we could get out of school earlier.

H. Would you do a LC again?

Yes-6

no comment-1

V. Grade Distributions For Learning Community Completers

ENG 101
A-3
B-3
C-1
D-0
F-2

ENG 102
A-1
B-1
C-1
F-2

ENG 203
A-3
B-2

Phi 105
A-10
B-4
C-1
F-7

BIO 100
A-3
B-7
C-5
D-1
F-5

* N may not be equal for classes

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